Dilemmas of Communism

Shortly after World War I a slightly rowdy popular song asked the question, "How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Paree?" But this problem of the farmer's sons never became really acute, even though the proportion of farm population in the United States gradually declined from one out of every three persons in 1913 to one out of every six in 1950.

The consequences were not serious because while this process of attraction to the cities and to industry was going on there was also under way such an increase in the rate and efficiency of farm production that by 1952 the nation's farms were furnishing nearly 80 per cent more food and other crops than in 1913.

Something very different has been taking place under the "dictatorship of the proletariat" (in which the proletariat has had little if any voice) in the Communist-ruled Soviet Union.

Gross agricultural production there in 1952 was only 10 per cent higher than in 1940, which in turn was but little above what it had been before 1928 when Stalin began imposing state-controlled collective farms. Grain production had just about kept up with the growth of population, but livestock production, according to Party Leader Khrushchev, was actually less than back in 1916 under the rule of the Czar. For an average Soviet citizen there was 23 pounds of meat per year, compared with 145 pounds per person in the United States.

It is true that Soviet heavy industry, the base for production of arms and machinery, has been pushed to such lengths as a sevenfold increase in steel capacity since 1929 and perhaps a trebling of electricity and industrial equipment output since 1945.

But this has been accomplished only by the drawing of considerable numbers of workers into the cities without any offsetting attention to the improvement of farm production or the conditions of farm living. Now Mr. Khrushchev seeks to combat the evident agricultural crisis by several methods, all of them questionable.

His effort to recruit young factory workers for state farms has met an unenthusiastic response. His project for plowing up virgin grasslands in Kazakhstan to plant corn appears likely to produce a huge dust bowl. And all talk of tractors and combines only highlights the fact that very little of Russia's industry has been geared to producing farm implements.

If these are the merits of centralized planning along Leninist and Stalinist lines, then some point is lent to an observation made the other day by Allen W. Dulles, director of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, to the Alumni Federation of Columbia University.

"In introducing mass education the troubled Soviet leaders have loosed forces dangerous to themselves," he said. "It will be very difficult for them henceforth to close off their own people from access to the realities of the outside world."

Thus the leaders of the Soviet Union face at least two uncomfortable problems: (1) How to balance distribution of labor between industry and agriculture so as to maintain a stable national base; (2) how to keep a growingly literate populace convinced that they are making such decisions more wisely than a representative government and a free economy could do.